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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed

President Bush's announcement of a Middle East conference in the fall. Saying that the White House lowered expectations for the conference, Yediot and Israel Radio quoted White House Press Secretary Tony Snow as saying on Tuesday: "I think a lot of people

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are inclined to try to treat this as a big peace conference. It's not. This is a meeting." Yediot quoted State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying on Tuesday: "Secretary Rice is going to host it here in the United States, but we still haven't decided exactly where." McCormack added: "I think privately we have heard from a number of different parties very positive responses to the President's remarks [on Monday]." The Jerusalem Post reported that despite President Bush's declaration of support for the Palestinians, particularly financial help, the US administration has acknowledged that no new funding requests have been made to Congress as part of the program outlined in Bush's speech on Monday. The Jerusalem Post reported that diplomacy has moved into high gear following President Bush's speech.

Erratum: Part of a sentence in Tuesday's Media Reaction Report was omitted. It should have read: "While citing the satisfaction of Fatah/PLO spokesmen over the President's address, the media quoted Hamas as saying that it was a 'crusade' against the Palestinian people."

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli diplomatic officials as saying on Tuesday that Syrian President Bashar Assad's demand that Israel agree to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights before negotiations can begin, does not meet basic Israeli requirements. The officials were responding to a speech that Assad gave to the Syrian parliament on Tuesday after being sworn in for a second seven-year term as president. Assad, in his speech, called on Israel to respond publicly to peace overtures from Damascus. He was quoted as saying: "The Israelis should remember that the price of peace is lower than the cost of war." The Jerusalem Post quoted an Israeli official as saying: "We are listening carefully to what he said, and waiting to get a full translation before responding formally." The official added: "We have stated repeatedly that we are more than willing, without prior conditions, to sit and talk. But the first thing we heard from him was a very clear set of preconditions." Yediot quoted senior diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that Israel will not publicly pledge to a full withdrawal from the Golan. Assad demanded "minimum" evidence that Israel was willing to formalize a peace agreement, citing the "Rabin Pledge," a promise allegedly made by late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin to Assad's father and predecessor, Hafez Assad, in which he unofficially gave his word that Israel would withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for complete peace with Syria. Although the pledge was never documented, Syria still holds it as a platform for potential talks. Assad also made reference to recent mediation efforts by a third party, but did not mention the party by name. Nevertheless, it is widely believed to be a reference to Turkey, which in recent months has "tested the waters" in Damascus and Jerusalem about a resumption of some sort of negotiations. Assad also reiterated his support for Hizbullah and Hamas, without specifically naming them. Maariv quoted Assad as saying that American figures who had supported Israel during the Second Lebanon War are now opposed to the official line of the US administration and call for peace between Syria and Israel.

All media reported that State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss will publish a scathing report today on the state of the home front and its functioning during the Second Lebanon War. The report is the longest the State Comptroller's Office has ever published, and it is also expected to be the harshest. Contrary to usual practice, it will name names in discussing the performance of several current and former senior officials: PM Ehud Olmert, former defense minister Amir Peretz, former IDF chief of staff Dan Halutz and commander of the IDF Home Front Command Yitzhak Gershon. The media reported that the Prime Minister's Office and the IDF are preparing, separately, to wage a media war against Lindenstrauss' conclusions. In both places, people have harshly criticized the comptroller's motives, findings and recommendations, as well as the tone of his report, in recent days.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday Kadima Knesset members loyal to Olmert expressed hope that the prospects of a fall summit

and an impending diplomatic process could extend Olmert's tenure and end threats from Labor Party Chairman Ehud Barak to remove the party from the government ahead of the final Winograd report's release in September or October.

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying on Tuesday that after Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and several of his associates asked Israel and Egypt not to open the Rafah crossing to Egyptian residents. Maariv reported that senior Al-Qaida activist Khaled Mustafa slipped by Egyptian border guards and entered the Gaza Strip through a tunnel.

Media reported that on Tuesday Israel released two high-ranking Hamas detainees, including former PA education minister and former deputy PM Nasser Shaer.

Leading media reported that Israeli President Shimon Peres took a hard line on Hamas in a meeting with Iceland's FM Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladdottir on Tuesday.

Ha'aretz quoted diplomatic sources as saying that UN cartographer Miklos Pinter has determined that the Sheba Farms, an area on the slopes of Mount Hermon claimed by Lebanon and under Israeli control, spans 20 to 40 square kilometers. The area of Mount Hermon that is under Israeli control extends to 70 square kilometers, and the entire Golan Heights is 1,250 square kilometers.

Yediot reported that the wait time for most visa interview appointments at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv is three months -- an unprecedented amount of time. The newspaper noted that besides the USD-112 application fee, applicants can pay hundreds of dollars to private agencies to help them through the process.

The Jerusalem Post reported that World Likud Chairman Danny Danon widened the field of candidates in the August 14 Likud leadership race to three on Tuesday as he challenged incumbent Binyamin Netanyahu and far-right activist Moshe Feiglin. The newspaper noted that Danon's views are just as hawkish as Feiglin's and they only differ on religion.

Ha'aretz reported that for the first time in the history of academic and musical life in Israel, dozens of musicians, scholars and educators from the field of classical music have come out with a joint call against the occupation and in favor of peace, rapprochement and a two-state solution.

All media reported that on Tuesday Justices questioned the U-turn of the prosecution in the sexual offense case allegedly involving former Israeli president Moshe Katsav.

Israel Radio reported that the Education Ministry has instructed all Israeli schools to screen during the upcoming academic year "An Inconvenient Truth," a documentary on former Vice President Al Gore's campaign to make the issue of global warming a recognized problem worldwide.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Check Point Software Technologies Ltd., a maker of security software, has been chosen as an approved vendor in the US Department of Defense's data-at-rest initiative, intended to protect sensitive information on government computers.

Ha'aretz cited the results of a poll released on Tuesday by the Anti-Defamation League, according to which 50 percent of Europeans in six countries believe that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their home country; 34.5 percent agree that Jews have too much financial and business clout; and 43 percent said Jews talk too much about the Holocaust. In Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, respondents said they viewed Israel more favorably than in 2005. The favorable rating for Israel dropped, meanwhile, in Austria and Hungary.

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel cannot allow itself to yawn at US President George W. Bush's speech calling for an international peace conference in September."

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "Some damage was caused [by President Bush's address]: For the sake of the holy balance, Bush reawakened the issue of [settler] outposts."

Veteran journalist Yosef (Tommy) Lapid, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, and former justice minister wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The ingenuousness of President Bush and President Peres is somewhat moving.... There will be no real peace here. It is important to internalize this so that we do not take irreversible paths."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz: "It appears that the work of the various mediators [between Israel and Syria], especially the Turks, has born fruit, in the form of public diplomacy that relies on new language."

Block Quotes:

II. "Israel Cannot Yawn"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (7/18): "Israel cannot allow itself to yawn at US President George W. Bush's speech calling for an international peace conference in September. It cannot allow itself to give up on any chance to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians, after the entire world and a large majority of the Israeli public have recognized the need to withdraw from the West Bank and end the occupation. The Qassam rocket fire from the Gaza Strip is not proof that withdrawals from the territories are not worthwhile for Israel, because the Gush Katif settlements were not a line of defense for the communities of southern Israel.... Instead of goading Bush over Iraq, scorning Abbas and minimizing the value of the new Palestinian government, Israel must do the minimum required of it. Removing outposts is not a gesture to the Palestinians, but to ourselves, and the same holds for every reduction of settlers beyond the West Bank separation fence, which was built precisely for that purpose.... Whoever wants the West Bank to serve as a model for Gaza, and possibly to encourage the Palestinians to choose the option of recognizing Israel and cooperating with it, must make every effort to improve the lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank. The government can also reduce the amount of roadblocks to the minimum necessary and prove that ending the violence pays off for the Palestinians and improves their lives."

II. "A Non-Dramatic Speech at an Odd Time"

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (7/18): "Some damage was caused [by President Bush's address]: For the sake of the holy balance, Bush reawakened the issue of [settler] outposts. It is as if he was saying that by devoting my speech to demands from the Palestinians, I had to raise some demands from the Israelis. The administration long ago stopped pressuring [Israel] on the matter, knowing that the current Israeli government, which depends on Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu, is not strong enough politically to go to another Amona [to fight over an outpost].... There is a great amount of moral distortion in pitting [Jewish homesteads] against Muslim terror and murderousness. In this regard, Monday's speech was not much more than lip service; it would be a great mistake if the Israeli government 'inhaled' it."

III. "Illusion Game"

Veteran journalist Yosef (Tommy) Lapid, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, and former justice minister wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/18): "The ingenuousness of President Bush and President Peres is somewhat moving. This week they outlined paths that are meant to lead to the yearned-for peace in the Middle East. Perhaps they really believe -- or at least hope -- that an arrangement can

be reached. Maybe they are only doing their duty, since politicians must strive for peace and promise a rosier future, even if they know in their hearts that there is no chance. There is no chance for peace, because there will always be elements in the Palestinian public, in the Arab countries, and the Muslim world, that will thwart any attempt to reach an arrangement recognizing Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state -- all the more an arrangement that does not ensure the return of the [Palestinian] refugees.... We should not deny that Israel has contributed to the creation of a situation that cannot lead to peace. Is there any chance of an Israel government that will be able to evacuate settlements? And the Golan for peace with Syria? And in the North? The Lebanese administration might fall into the hands of Hizbullah at any time.... [Also, Iran] will sooner or later have lethal weapons.... After the Americans leave Iraq. Defeated and humiliated, Arab nationalism and Islamic fanaticism will increase tremendously.... We must talk, meet, make announcements, sign, threaten, hope, predict, and promise. But that is valid and necessary as long as we understand that this is a game of illusions. The harsh reality is that there will be no real peace here. It is important to internalize this so that we do not take irreversible paths."

IV. "Assad's Roadmap"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz (7/18): "One of the regular conditions was missing from Syrian President Bashar Assad's comments yesterday: the caveat that any negotiations with Israel must pick up where they left off. Israel has always seen this statement as an obstacle set up by Syria, since it aims to prevent talks from expanding or from opening the door to new Israeli demands.... The other condition that Assad refrained from mentioning was his demand that the United States get involved in the talks. This condition, which was raised recently by Syrian spokesmen, was used by Israel as evidence that all Assad wants is to get Washington off his back, and not to make progress on the diplomatic front. With appropriate caution, Assad said the next phase of negotiations would require the involvement of an impartial mediator, without going into details. With the neutralization of the first condition and the fact that Assad did not explicitly mention Washington as an essential mediator, it appears that the work of the various mediators, especially the Turks, has born fruit, in the form of public diplomacy that relies on new language."

12. Iran:

Summary:

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The main effort now should be directed at the Iranian theater, not the Palestinian front, and the focus should be on preventing Iran from going nuclear."

Block Quotes:

"Iran as the Main Strategic Sector"

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (7/18): "The main effort now should be directed at the Iranian theater, not the Palestinian front, and the focus should be on preventing Iran from going nuclear. The side that it is vital to strengthen is not Abu Mazen, an unwieldy support for all intents and purposes, but rather Israel itself.... In fact, [Israel] has already defined for itself several of the necessary deterrent responses. Versus the low-intensity threats posed by Palestinian terrorism, Israel has established a considerable degree of deterrence thanks to the targeted killings... A similar strategy may also be of use against the danger of higher-intensity military actions, of the type that Syria is liable to take. Versus the vulnerability of the Israeli home front to

missiles and rockets, there is a clear vulnerability of the Syrian regime to forceful Israeli measures.... The main challenge, however, lies in coping with the Iranian threat. This threat, if it matures to the point of military nuclear capability, will require a complex and comprehensive deterrent response.... But the most significant component is the punitive component. We should note the 'Shimon Peres formula' in this context. When Peres was asked recently for his opinion on the threats of destruction arriving from Iran, he replied laconically, 'Iran can also be destroyed.' This answer also demonstrates the 'beheading' strategy. And if this formula is not enough to deter the 'undeterred,' it may not be the highest level of necessary deterrence.... If the current Israeli action on the Palestinian front is supposed to pave the way to more effective coping by the international community with the Iranian issue, it is useful. But if this is not the purpose, it will divert efforts to a secondary sector and lead to evasion from coping with the main battle."

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